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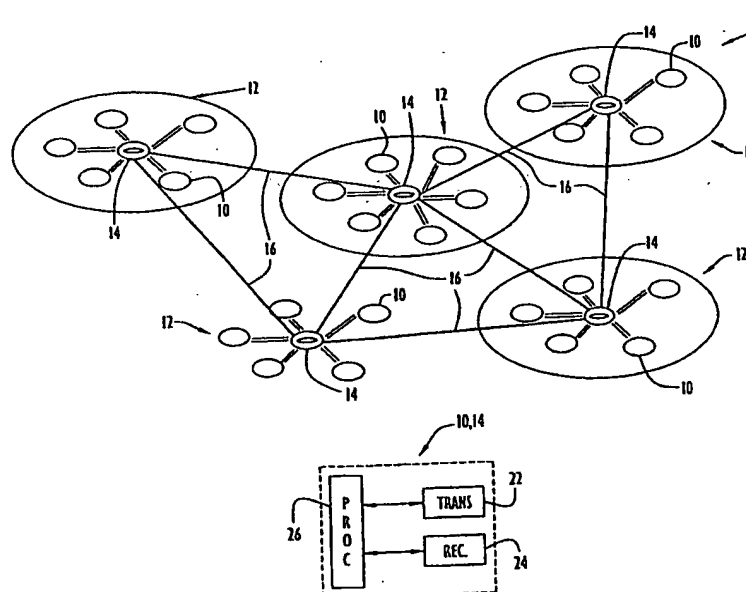
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(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR TRANSMISSION OF NODE LINK STATUS MESSAGES THROUGHOUT A NETWORK WITH REDUCED COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL OVERHEAD TRAFFIC



(57) Abstract: The present invention transmits Link-State Advertisement (LSA) type or database update messages or packets of an internetworking protocol within a wireless communication system or network via insertion of the packet within packets of an intranet protocol. Specifically, a wireless network includes a plurality of nodes arranged into clusters with each cluster having cluster member nodes and a designated cluster head node. The nodes communicate with each other via an intranet protocol, while the network may communicate with other external networks in accordance with an internetworking protocol (e.g., a modified version of the conventional Open Shortest Path First (OSPF) routing protocol, or a Radio Open Shortest

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Path First (ROSPF) protocol). A database within each network node contains link information for that node, while the ROSPF LSA type packets contain information to update the node databases. The ROSPF LSA type packets are transmitted to neighbors of each node to enable each database to maintain current information. In order to reduce overhead of transmitting numerous LSA type packets, the present invention transmits the ROSPF LSA type packet within an intranet protocol beacon type or node status packet that is periodically broadcasted within the network. Thus, the overhead rate of increase is reduced, thereby permitting the network to utilize an ROSPF type protocol while expanding to larger scales.

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR TRANSMISSION OF NODE LINK STATUS
MESSAGES THROUGHOUT A NETWORK WITH REDUCED
COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL OVERHEAD TRAFFIC

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority from U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/164,940, entitled "Flooding of Rospf Link-State Advertisements Through Clustering Beacons for Drastic Reduction of Rospf Overhead" and filed November 12, 1999. The disclosure of that provisional application is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Technical Field

The present invention pertains to communication systems. In particular, the present invention pertains to a communication system employing broadcast-based flooding schemes for synchronizing routing databases with reduced communication protocol overhead.

2. Discussion of Related Art

Generally, wireless networks may be arranged in a two-tier architecture similar to that of conventional cellular telephone systems. The first tier typically includes clusters or cells each including a plurality of communication nodes or cluster members. One node within each cluster is designated as a cluster head or base station. The second tier includes a backbone network formed of the cluster head nodes to enable communications between different clusters (e.g., for data transmitted over greater distances). The formation of clusters and designation of cluster head nodes is generally performed dynamically and in accordance with an intranet protocol (e.g., a protocol for communications within the two-tier network) that further performs routing functions within the network. The intranet protocol is preferably a link-state type of routing protocol that is implemented on the backbone network. The cluster head nodes each include a database that is synchronized with other cluster head node databases by transference of Link-State Advertisement (LSA) packets in accordance with the protocol. These databases include information enabling the cluster head nodes to determine appropriate paths for routing messages through the network, while the LSA packets provide information to update the databases.

1 In order to facilitate internet routing or routing between the two-tier and other external
2 networks (e.g., the Internet), a modified version of the conventional Open Shortest Path First
3 (OSPF) Protocol is employed. The OSPF protocol is basically a routing protocol employed
4 for Internet Protocol (IP) type networks, while the modified protocol or Radio Open Shortest
5 Path First (ROSPF) protocol is similar to OSPF, but is adapted for use with radio or wireless
6 networks. For examples of implementation of the OSPF Protocol, reference is made to RFC
7 1583, Moy, "OSPF Version 2," March 1994, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein
8 by reference in its entirety. Thus, the ROSPF protocol is basically an internetworking or
9 gateway protocol facilitating communications with external networks.

10 Routing is accomplished in the OSPF protocol by each network node having a routing
11 database containing information related to network topology (e.g., links between network
12 nodes). The routing database is utilized by each node to determine a path for transmitting a
13 message to a destination site. The routing databases are updated by exchanging Link- State
14 Advertisement (LSA) packets between neighboring nodes. These packets generally include
15 information related to current links of network nodes and are typically transferred periodically
16 and/or in the event of a modification to the network topology. The OSPF protocol designates
17 a particular router to flood LSA packets to neighbors in broadcast type networks, while LSA
18 packets are transmitted via point-to-point and/or broadcast packets within non-broadcast type
19 networks. The ROSPF protocol employed by the two-tier network described above is similar
20 to the OSPF protocol and exchanges LSA type packets between neighbors (e.g., cluster head
21 and member nodes) to synchronize routing databases as described above. Since the two-tier
22 network is not a broadcast type network, an LSA packet is sent as a point-to-point message
23 to each of its protocol neighbors.

24 The above-described technique for transmitting LSA packets on the two-tier network
25 suffers from several disadvantages. In particular, the intranet and ROSPF protocols generate
26 control traffic where the amount of traffic increases with network size. In fact, the amount
27 of ROSPF overhead traffic increases at a significantly greater rate than network capacity as
28 network size increases, thereby degrading network performance. Although the ROSPF
29 protocol introduces additional overhead in initializing neighbors and exchanging database
30 descriptions, the predominant portion of the overhead is attributed to the flooding or
31 transmission of LSA packets. As a result of the rate of increased overhead, the network

1 becomes unsuitable to transport user traffic or maintain a functioning state when the network
2 includes greater than approximately one-hundred fifty nodes. Since the two-tier network may
3 employ a maximum of approximately one-thousand nodes, the increased overhead limits
4 performance of small-scale networks and restricts deployment of the protocol for large-scale
5 networks.

6 The present invention overcomes the aforementioned problems and achieves
7 transmission of LSA type or database update packets for synchronization of node routing
8 databases with a reduced rate of overhead increase in relation to network size. This is
9 accomplished by inserting the ROSPFP protocol database update packets within intranet
10 protocol beacon type or node status packets to reduce the rate of protocol overhead. The node
11 status packets are periodically transmitted by cluster member and cluster head nodes to
12 advertise the presence of that node to the network. The present invention minimizes the
13 impact of protocol overhead on network throughput, and permits an ROSPFP type protocol to
14 be utilized on large-scale wireless networks. Thus, networks may employ the protocol, while
15 scaling to a greater size.

16 OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

17 Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to reduce the rate of overhead of
18 a communication routing protocol and enable employment of the protocol with large-scale
19 type networks.

20 It is another object of the present invention to transmit database update packets of a
21 communication protocol within packets of other protocols to reduce communication protocol
22 overhead and enhance communication network throughput.

23 Yet another object of the present invention is to synchronize routing databases of
24 communication network nodes in a manner that minimally affects network throughput.

25 The aforesaid objects may be achieved individually and/or in combination, and it is
26 not intended that the present invention be construed as requiring two or more of the objects
27 to be combined unless expressly required by the claims attached hereto.

28 According to the present invention, Link-State Advertisement (LSA) type or database
29 update messages or packets of an internetworking protocol are transmitted within a wireless
30 communication system or network via insertion of the packet within packets of an intranet
31 protocol. Specifically, a wireless network includes a plurality of nodes arranged into clusters

1 with each cluster having cluster member nodes and a designated cluster head node. The nodes
2 communicate with each other via an intranet protocol, while the network may communicate
3 with other external networks in accordance with an internetworking protocol (e.g., a modified
4 version of the conventional Open Shortest Path First (OSPF) routing protocol, or a Radio
5 Open Shortest Path First (ROSPF) protocol). A database within each network node contains
6 link information for that node, while the ROSPF LSA type packets contain information to
7 update the node databases. The ROSPF LSA type packets are transmitted to neighbors of each
8 node to enable each database to maintain current information. In order to reduce overhead of
9 transmitting numerous LSA type packets, the present invention transmits the ROSPF LSA
10 type packet within an intranet protocol beacon type or node status packet that is periodically
11 broadcasted within the network. Thus, the overhead rate of increase is reduced, thereby
12 permitting the network to utilize an ROSPF type protocol while expanding to larger scales.

13 The above and still further objects, features and advantages of the present invention
14 will become apparent upon consideration of the following detailed description of specific
15 embodiments thereof, particularly when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings
16 wherein like reference numerals in the various figures are utilized to designate like
17 components.

18 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

19 Fig. 1A is a diagrammatic illustration of network nodes according to the present
20 invention arranged in an exemplary communication network.

21 Fig. 1B is a block diagram of a network node of Fig. 1.

22 Fig. 2 is a procedural flow chart illustrating the manner in which a network node
23 transmits database update packets to other network nodes according to the present invention.

24 Fig. 3 is a procedural flow chart illustrating the manner in which a network node
25 receives and processes database update packets according to the present invention.

26 Fig. 4 is a graphical illustration of the relationship between the overhead generated by
27 the present invention for transmission of database update packets and the overhead generated
28 by conventional techniques for transmitting those packets.

29 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

30 Network nodes according to the present invention arranged in an exemplary two-tier
31 wireless network are illustrated in Fig. 1A. Specifically, wireless network 2 includes a

1 plurality of nodes 10 arranged in cells or clusters 12. Each cell or cluster includes
2 corresponding cluster member nodes 10 with one of those cluster member nodes designated
3 as a cluster head node or base station 14. These cluster arrangements form the first tier of
4 network 2 and facilitate communication within a cluster between the cluster head and member
5 nodes preferably utilizing a first transmission frequency. The head nodes of each cluster are
6 in communication with each other, preferably utilizing a second transmission frequency, and
7 form a backbone network 16. The backbone network essentially forms the second tier of
8 network 2 and facilitates communications between nodes of different clusters (e.g., generally
9 providing communications over greater distances). The architecture of network 2 is similar
10 to that of conventional cellular telephone systems, except that network 2 employs an intranet
11 protocol (e.g., a protocol for communications within the two-tier network) providing dynamic
12 selection of cells and cluster head nodes as described below.

13 A network node 10 according to the present invention is illustrated in Fig. 1B.
14 Specifically, node 10 includes a transmitter 22, a receiver 24 and a processor 26. The
15 processor is preferably implemented by a conventional microprocessor or controller and
16 controls the node to transmit and receive messages in accordance with the communication
17 protocols described below. The transmitter is preferably implemented by a conventional
18 transmitter and transmits messages from the processor, preferably in the form of radio
19 frequency (RF) signals, in accordance with processor instructions. Receiver 24 is typically
20 implemented by a conventional receiver and configured to receive signals, preferably in the
21 form of radio frequency (RF) signals, transmitted by the transmitter of another node. The
22 receiver receives transmitted signals and forwards the received signals to processor 26 for
23 processing. A present invention head node 14 is substantially similar to node 10 described
24 above.

25 The arrangement of nodes 10 within clusters 12 and the designation of cluster head
26 nodes 14 are dynamically determined by an intranet protocol that handles routing of packets
27 within network 2. The intranet protocol is preferably a link-state type routing protocol that is
28 implemented on backbone network 16. Cluster head nodes 14 each maintain a database
29 including information enabling the cluster head to determine appropriate paths for routing
30 messages through the network. The information typically relates to links between the various
31 network nodes. The cluster head databases are synchronized in accordance with the protocol

1 by transference of Link-State Advertisement (LSA) packets between cluster head nodes that
2 provide network information to update the databases. In addition, each node (e.g., cluster head
3 and member nodes) periodically broadcasts a beacon type or node status packet in accordance
4 with the intranet protocol. This packet basically advertises the presence of a node within the
5 network. The rate of transmission of a node status packet by a cluster head node is
6 significantly greater than the transmission rate for that packet by a cluster member node since
7 cluster head node status packets are typically utilized for "keep alive" and neighbor discovery
8 purposes. Thus, the time interval (T_{CH}) between transmissions of node status packets by a
9 cluster head node is significantly less than the corresponding time interval (T_{CM}) between
10 transmissions of those packets by a cluster member node.

11 With respect to communications between network 2 and other external networks (e.g.,
12 the Internet), the network employs a Radio Open Shortest Path First (ROSPF) protocol. This
13 protocol is basically a modified version of the conventional Open Shortest Path First (OSPF)
14 protocol commonly utilized for Internet Protocol (IP) type networks. Since the OSPF protocol
15 generates significant overhead when applied to ad-hoc networks (e.g., networks having
16 temporary or wireless connections where communication devices are part of the network
17 during a communication session or, in the case of mobile systems, while in proximity to the
18 network), such as network 2, that protocol has been modified to derive the ROSPF protocol
19 suitable for use with wireless or radio networks. According to the ROSPF protocol, each node
20 within network 2 maintains a routing database including information enabling the node to
21 determine an appropriate path for routing a message to the external network. The information
22 contained within the node databases typically relates to links between the various network
23 nodes. The ROSPF protocol is a link-state type routing protocol and provides for
24 synchronization of node databases through transmission of Link-State Advertisement (LSA)
25 type or database update packets to each network node. These packets are conventionally
26 transmitted to each neighboring network node via plural point-to-point messages (e.g.,
27 messages from a source node to a specific destination network node) in response to changes
28 in network topology, an external network connected to network 2 or other modifications to
29 the network facilitating changes in a node database. When a database update packet is
30 received, a point-to-point OSPF type acknowledgment (ACK) packet is commonly transmitted
31 to the source node from the destination node to indicate packet reception.

1 The present invention basically employs an enhanced technique to transmit the
2 ROSPF database update packets within network 2, while reducing overhead traffic. In
3 particular, a member node 10 of a cluster 12 transmits a database update packet to a
4 corresponding cluster head node 14 via a point-to-point message as described above. Since
5 the cluster head node is in communication with its corresponding cluster member nodes,
6 reduced transmissions may be realized if one reliable broadcast message is utilized to transmit
7 the database update packet. Further, the broadcast message may be utilized to transmit the
8 database update packet to neighboring cluster head nodes that further transmit the packet in
9 a like manner, thereby facilitating transmission of the packet throughout network 2.
10 Accordingly, the present invention provides for transmission of the received database update
11 packets by the cluster head node to its corresponding member nodes and neighboring network
12 cluster head nodes within intranet protocol beacon type or node status packets that are
13 periodically transmitted throughout the network as described above. Since the node status
14 packets typically contain a relatively low quantity of data, there exists sufficient storage
15 within that packet to contain at least one database update packet. Thus, significant reduction
16 in transmission overhead may be achieved through use of intranet protocol node status
17 packets to transmit the ROSPF database update packets. In addition, reception of database
18 update packets by cluster head nodes is impliedly acknowledged (e.g., without transmission
19 of specific point-to-point type acknowledgment packets) as described below. The cluster head
20 nodes subsequently transmit the database update packets in a like manner to their neighbors
21 to facilitate transmission of the packet throughout network 2.

22 The node status packets are preferably transmitted utilizing a reliable broadcast
23 technique, such as the scheme disclosed in the co-pending U.S. Patent Application having
24 Docket No. 0918.0033C, entitled "Method and Apparatus for Broadcasting Messages in
25 Channel Reservation Communication Systems" and filed November 3, 2000, the disclosure
26 of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. In order to enhance performance
27 reliability, the node status packets may be transmitted two or more times. If transmission of
28 broadcast messages achieves a ninety percent success rate, transmitting those messages twice
29 enhances that rate to approximately ninety-nine percent. Accordingly, the database update
30 packets are preferably transmitted twice for improved reliability as described below.

31 The intranet protocol typically includes several layers to facilitate communications

1 between network nodes, and is typically implemented by the processors of those nodes. Packet
2 concatenation functions are generally accomplished within the intranet protocol by a layer that
3 passes traffic from a protocol intranet layer to a protocol link layer and from the link layer to
4 appropriate intranet layer modules. Since insertion of ROSPF database update packets within
5 intranet protocol node status packets is basically a type of packet concatenation, this process
6 is preferably implemented within the intranet protocol concatenation layer.

7 The node status packets are periodically transmitted in accordance with the intranet
8 protocol as described above. However, those packets may not be immediately available to
9 transport a database update packet to other network nodes in the event that a database update
10 packet is received or generated within the time interval between transmission of the node
11 status packets. Accordingly, a queue, preferably in the form of a First In First Out (FIFO)
12 queue, is utilized by a node processor to store update database packets until a node status
13 packet is available for transmission. The database update packets are initially placed onto the
14 queue upon receipt by the intranet protocol concatenation layer. When a node status packet
15 is generated for transmission, the concatenation layer inserts an appropriate quantity of
16 database update packets stored in the queue into the node status packet. The quantity of
17 database update packets inserted into the node status packet is based on the size of the stored
18 database update packets and the amount of available storage capacity within the node status
19 packet. The integrated node status and database update packet is subsequently processed and
20 transmitted in accordance with the intranet protocol. Since the database update packets are
21 preferably transmitted two or more times, each instance of a particular database packet is
22 placed within a different node status packet for reliability purposes. For example, when a
23 database update packet is to be transmitted twice, that database update packet is placed within
24 two separate node status packets. The database update packets remain on the queue until the
25 desired quantity of transmissions have occurred.

26 The manner in which a node processor facilitates transmission or flooding of a
27 database update packet according to the present invention is illustrated in Fig. 2. Specifically,
28 an event (e.g., change in network topology, external network connected to network 2,
29 reception of a database update packet, etc.) triggering transmission of a database update
30 packet by a node occurs at step 30. If the node is designated as a cluster head node as
31 determined at step 32, a database update packet is generated and transmitted or broadcasted

1 to neighboring nodes the desired quantity of times at step 34. In particular, the generated
2 database update packet is placed on a queue for transmission within an available intranet
3 protocol node status packet as described above. The node status packet is periodically
4 broadcasted through the network by each node to indicate the node's presence within the
5 network as described above. In response to an available node status packet, the database
6 update packet is removed from the queue and placed within the available packet for
7 transmission to neighboring nodes via a reliable transmission scheme, such as the technique
8 disclosed in the above-referenced co-pending application. Subsequent transmission of the
9 database update packet the desired quantity of times, a timer for re-transmission of the
10 database update packet to cluster head neighboring nodes is set at step 36 to preferably two
11 and one-half times the time interval (T_{CH}) between transmissions of node status packets by a
12 cluster head node. Similarly, a timer for re-transmission of a database update packet to
13 corresponding member nodes is set at step 38 to preferably two and one-half times the time
14 interval (T_{CM}) between transmissions of node status packets by a cluster member node. Since
15 the database update packets are preferably transmitted two or more times to provide enhanced
16 reliability, re-transmission of a database update packet to a succeeding hop should not be
17 attempted in response to unacknowledged transmissions of that packet until the hop has had
18 sufficient time to broadcast the database update packet the desired quantity of transmissions.
19 Thus, the respective re-transmission timers are set at a minimum to the quantity of desired
20 broadcast transmissions for a database update packet multiplied by the appropriate node status
21 packet transmission interval for a cluster head or member node. Accordingly, since the present
22 invention preferably transmits database update packets twice, the re-transmission timers are
23 set, by way of example only, to approximately two and one-half times the appropriate node
24 transmission intervals to provide a sufficient margin for re-transmission of database update
25 packets. However, the re-transmission timers may be set to any desired intervals.

26 If the node transmitting the database update packet in response to an event is a cluster
27 member node as determined at step 32, a database update packet is generated and transmitted
28 as a point-to-point message to the corresponding cluster head node at step 40. Further, the
29 timer for re-transmission of the database update packet is preferably set, by way of example
30 only, to two and one-half times the time interval (T_{CH}) between transmissions of node status
31 packets by a cluster head node. The timer is set to this value to provide sufficient time for the

1 receiving cluster head node to transmit the database update packet to neighboring nodes for
2 the desired quantity of transmissions prior to re-transmission of that database update packet
3 as described above. In the event a re-transmission timer of a cluster head or member node
4 expires, database update packets transmitted by the node that have not been acknowledged
5 are re-transmitted as point-to-point messages to those neighbors associated with the expired
6 timer (e.g., cluster head or member nodes) and not acknowledging receipt of the transmitted
7 packets.

8 The manner in which a node processor processes received database update packets
9 according to the present invention is illustrated in Fig. 3. Initially, a database update packet
10 is received by a node at step 50. The node may be a cluster head or member node where the
11 database update packet may be received from a neighboring cluster head node either within
12 an intranet protocol node status packet or as a point-to-point message for re-transmission of
13 unacknowledged packets as described above. Alternatively, the node may be a cluster head
14 node where the database update packet may be received from a corresponding member node
15 as a point-to-point message as described above. If the packet is received from a node that is
16 not a neighbor as determined from the node database at step 52, the packet is dropped at step
17 54. When the packet is received from a neighboring node, the node processor determines
18 whether or not the received packet has already been received at step 56. If the packet has not
19 been received, the packet is processed at step 64. This typically includes updating the node
20 database with corresponding information contained in the received packet and flooding that
21 packet within the network in the appropriate manner for a cluster head or member node
22 described above. When the receiving node has been designated a cluster member node as
23 determined at step 66, an OSPF type acknowledgment packet is sent to the sender of the
24 received packet as a broadcast message at step 68. This packet is typically broadcasted via
25 insertion within node status packets in substantially the same manner described above for
26 database update packets. If the receiving node has been designated as a cluster head node,
27 acknowledgments are implied in accordance with transmissions of database update packets
28 as described below.

29 When the receiving node has already received the arriving database update packet as
30 determined at step 56, the processor determines at step 58 if the received packet is a point-to-
31 point message for re-transmission of an unacknowledged database update packet. If the

1 message is a re-transmission of an unacknowledged database update packet, an OSPF type
2 acknowledgment packet is transmitted to the sender as a point-to-point message at step 62.
3 Otherwise, the packet is processed as an implied acknowledgment for database update packets
4 transmitted by the receiving node. Basically, a network node interprets reception of a
5 database update packet from a neighboring cluster head or member node as an
6 acknowledgment when the receiving node is expecting an acknowledgment from the neighbor
7 for the same database update packet previously sent to that neighbor by the receiving node.
8 For example, an implied acknowledgment received by a cluster head or member node from
9 a neighboring cluster head node may be in the form of a broadcasted database update packet
10 when the neighboring cluster head node broadcasts a database update packet received from
11 that cluster head or member node. Alternatively, the implied acknowledgment received by a
12 cluster head node from a corresponding member node may be in the form of a point-to-point
13 message when the cluster head node broadcasts a database update packet received from that
14 member node. Thus, reception of a database update packet by a receiving node that previously
15 transmitted the received packet indicates reception of that packet by the sending node (e.g.,
16 the node sending the implied acknowledgment). The various packets typically include
17 identifiers or other information to indicate the source node and type of message (e.g.,
18 broadcast, point-to-point, node status packet, etc.) being sent.

19 Since the present invention utilizes intranet protocol node status packets to flood or
20 broadcast ROSPF database update packets, limited additional packets are generated. In fact,
21 the present invention typically requires one point-to-point message to transmit a database
22 update packet across the exemplary two-tier network. Basically, the present invention
23 sacrifices node status packet size for lower flooding packet rate. The node status and database
24 update packets are relatively small in size, thereby minimizing impact on network
25 performance. Further, the relatively small size of these packets reduces the database update
26 packet flooding rate to drastically enhance network performance. Specifically, the
27 conventional flooding technique within the ROSPF protocol described above requires H (e.g.,
28 where H is an integer generally greater than zero) point-to-point messages to flood one
29 database update packet to an entire network. The value of H may be determined as follows:

$$H = 2N (C + M)$$

30
31 where C is an integer generally greater than zero and represents the average quantity of cluster

member nodes within a cluster; M is an integer generally greater than zero and represents the average quantity of cluster head node neighbors; and N is an integer generally greater than zero and represents the quantity of cluster head nodes in a network. Table I below indicates the quantity of required transmissions to flood the database update packet within networks having various exemplary configurations. Since the present invention typically requires one point-to-point message, the protocol overhead is drastically reduced.

Table I

N	C	M	Network Size (Nodes)	H (Conventional)	H (Present Invention)
10	15	4	160	380	1
20	15	4	320	760	1
30	15	4	480	1140	1
40	15	4	640	1520	1
50	15	4	800	1900	1

In addition, the present invention has been simulated using a network simulation tool (e.g., OPNET available from Mil 3, Inc.). The results of the simulation indicating overhead generated by the present invention in relation to overhead generated by conventional flooding schemes is illustrated in Fig. 4. Thus, as Table I and Fig. 4 illustrate, the present invention significantly reduces generated overhead traffic during flooding.

The ROSPf database update packets are carried by intranet protocol node status packets to the next-hop destinations in accordance with the present invention. Since the node status packets are periodically transmitted and generally not immediately available, the present invention introduces latency when transmitting the database update packets to network nodes. However, the introduced latency has a minimal effect on protocol performance in the network. For example, network 2 may cover an area of one-hundred kilometers by two-hundred

1 kilometers where flooding a database update packet typically requires less than twenty hops
2 to cover a two-hundred kilometer distance depending upon the node radio range. Thus, a
3 maximum delay for reception of a database update packet by a node is $20T_{CH}$ or one-hundred
4 seconds where the cluster head transmission interval (T_{CH}) is approximately five seconds.
5 Since the maximum life span of a database update packet is approximately one-hour, the
6 delays or latency introduced by the present invention are small in comparison to that life span
7 (e.g., less than 3% of the maximum database update packet life span).

8 It will be appreciated that the embodiments described above and illustrated in the
9 drawings represent only a few of the many ways of implementing a method and apparatus for
10 transmission of node link status messages throughout a network with reduced communication
11 protocol overhead traffic.

12 The communication networks employing the present invention nodes may include any
13 quantity of those nodes or tiers. The network nodes may be arranged in any fashion into any
14 quantity of clusters or cells each having any quantity of nodes and head nodes. The backbone
15 network may include any quantity of head nodes, while communications within a cluster and
16 between neighboring cluster head nodes of the backbone network may utilize the same or
17 different transmission frequencies. The formation of cells and designation of head nodes may
18 be predetermined or accomplished dynamically via any conventional or other algorithm or
19 technique. The nodes may communicate via any suitable communications medium (e.g.,
20 wired or wireless communication devices, etc.). The present invention node may include any
21 quantity of conventional or other transmitters, where each transmitter may transmit signals
22 at any suitable frequency and in any suitable energy form (e.g., radio signals, microwave,
23 optical signals, etc.), and any quantity of conventional or other receivers, where each receiver
24 may receive signals at any suitable frequency and in any suitable energy form (e.g., radio
25 signals, microwave, optical signals, etc.). Alternatively, the present invention node may
26 include any quantity of combined transmitting/receiving devices.

27 The processor of the present invention node may be implemented by any conventional
28 or other microprocessor, controller or circuitry to perform the functions described herein,
29 while any quantity of processors or processing devices or circuitry may be employed within
30 the present invention node where the processor functions may be distributed in any fashion
31 among any quantity of modules, processors or other processing devices or circuits. The

1 software for the processor of the present invention node may be implemented in any suitable
2 computer language, and could be developed by one of ordinary skill in the computer and/or
3 programming arts based on the functional description contained herein and the flow charts
4 illustrated in the drawings. Further, any references herein of software performing various
5 functions generally refer to processors performing those functions under software control.
6 The software and/or algorithms described above and illustrated in the flow charts may be
7 modified in any manner that accomplishes the functions described herein. The present
8 invention node may alternatively include any components arranged in any fashion to facilitate
9 distribution of packets within the network in the manner described above.

10 The LSA, node status, database update and other packets or messages (e.g.,
11 acknowledge, point-to-point message, broadcast message, etc.) may be of any size, may have
12 any format, and may contain any desired information. The packets may be transmitted at any
13 suitable transmission rate or have any desired interval between transmissions. The re-
14 transmission timers may be implemented by any conventional or other timing mechanisms
15 (e.g., processor clock, external hardware, software, etc.) and may be set to any desired
16 intervals for re-transmission of any packets. The timers may be associated with any types of
17 packets to indicate re-transmission of those packets. The member nodes may communicate
18 a database update, acknowledgment or other type of packet to a cluster head node via any type
19 of message. Further, the various messages may include any identifier to identify the type of
20 message or packet. The database update or other packets may be broadcasted or transmitted
21 any quantity of times to achieve a desired success rate, where the repeated packets may be
22 disposed within the same or different node status packets in any desired combination or
23 fashion.

24 The communication network may employ any suitable intranet and/or internetworking
25 communications protocols to facilitate reception, processing and transference of messages or
26 packets within or external of the network. The present invention may be utilized within any
27 intranet, internetworking or other protocol to transmit or flood messages within the network
28 in accordance with that protocol. The insertion of the database update packets within the node
29 status packet may be accomplished within any layer of the intranet or other protocol. The
30 node database may be implemented by any conventional database or other storage structure
31 (e.g., processor memory, external memory, file, data structure (e.g., array, queue, stack, etc.),

1 etc.) and may have any desired storage capacity to contain any desired information. The
2 queue may be implemented by any conventional or other storage unit or structure (e.g.,
3 processor memory, external memory, file, data structure (e.g., array, queue, stack, etc.), etc.)
4 having any desired storage capacity to store database update or other messages for subsequent
5 processing. The queue may be implemented by any suitable data structure employing any
6 algorithm for insertion and removal of data (e.g., LIFO, FIFO, etc.).

7 The database update and node status packets may be transmitted at any desired
8 intervals and/or in response to any desired events or conditions. The node status packets may
9 receive any quantity of database update packets, and may alternatively be utilized to broadcast
10 any types of messages throughout the network. Similarly, any intranet protocol messages may
11 be inserted within internetworking protocol packets for distribution throughout the network.

12 The acknowledgments may be implied in any manner indicating reception of a packet by a
13 destination node, or transmission of an acknowledgment from a receiving node may be
14 required by a transmitting node. Packets may be re-transmitted in response to any suitable
15 conditions, and may be sent via any type of messages (e.g., broadcast, point-to-point, etc.).

16 The cluster head and member nodes may transmit database update or other packets to any
17 neighboring cluster head or member nodes to distribute packets to those nodes and/or
18 throughout the network.

19 It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the applications or
20 networks described herein, but may be utilized for various communication applications or
21 networks, especially those including wireless radio networks employing OSPF type internet
22 routing protocols. Further, the present invention may be applied to any link-state routing
23 protocol and to the flooding of any link-state based advertisements or other messages.
24 Moreover, the present invention may be applied to various networks and communications
25 applications to transmit or flood status or other messages throughout the network with reduced
26 communication protocol overhead traffic.

27 From the foregoing description, it will be appreciated that the invention makes
28 available a novel method and apparatus for transmission of node link status messages
29 throughout a network with reduced communication protocol overhead traffic wherein database
30 update packets of an internetworking protocol are transmitted within node status packets of
31 an intranet protocol to flood the database update packets within a network for database

1 synchronization.

2 Having described preferred embodiments of a new and improved method and
3 apparatus for transmission of node link status messages throughout a network with reduced
4 communication protocol overhead traffic, it is believed that other modifications, variations
5 and changes will be suggested to those skilled in the art in view of the teachings set forth
6 herein. It is therefore to be understood that all such variations, modifications and changes are
7 believed to fall within the scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. In a communications network, a communication unit to transmit and receive
2 messages within said network comprising:
3 a transmitter to transmit an outgoing message to at least one other communication unit
4 within said network;
5 a receiver to receive an incoming message from at least one other communication unit
6 within said network; and
7 a processor to control said transmission and reception of said outgoing and incoming
8 messages, wherein said processor includes:
9 a broadcast module to facilitate periodic transmission of a unit message to said
10 at least one other communication unit, wherein said unit message includes information
11 relating to a status of said communication unit; and
12 a message module to insert a broadcast message within said unit message to
13 facilitate transmission of said broadcast message to said at least one other communication unit
14 in conjunction with transmission of said unit message.
- 1 2. The unit of claim 1 wherein said transmitter transmits said outgoing message
2 in the form of radio signals.
- 1 3. The unit of claim 1 wherein said receiver receives said incoming message in
2 the form of radio signals.
- 1 4. The unit of claim 1 wherein said processor further includes a storage unit to
2 store said broadcast message until a succeeding transmission time for said unit message.
- 1 5. The unit of claim 4 wherein said storage unit stores a plurality of broadcast
2 messages, and said message module inserts at least one of said stored messages within said
3 unit message.
- 1 6. The unit of claim 1 wherein said processor further includes:
2 an internal communications module to facilitate communications within said network

3 in accordance with an intranet protocol; and
4 an external communications module to facilitate communications between said
5 network and an external network in accordance with an internetworking protocol.

1 7. The unit of claim 6 wherein said internetworking protocol includes a Radio
2 Open Shortest Path First protocol.

1 8. The unit of claim 6 wherein:
2 said unit message is associated with said intranet protocol and said broadcast module
3 periodically transmits said unit message in accordance with said intranet protocol; and
4 said broadcast message is associated with said internetworking protocol and said
5 message module inserts said internetworking protocol broadcast message into said intranet
6 protocol unit message to facilitate transmission of said broadcast message in conjunction with
7 said transmission of said intranet protocol unit message.

1 9. The unit of claim 6 wherein:
2 said communications network includes a plurality of clusters each having a plurality
3 of said communication units, wherein one of said communication units of each said cluster
4 is designated as a head unit with remaining communication units of that cluster being
5 designated as member units;
6 head units of said clusters communicate with each other and with corresponding
7 member units of that cluster to facilitate communications between and within said clusters;
8 said processor further includes a database to store information indicating particular
9 network communication units in communication with said communication unit, wherein a
10 database update message including information relating to a current status of network
11 connections is distributed throughout said network in accordance with said internetworking
12 protocol to synchronize said database of each said communication unit.

1 10. The unit of claim 9 wherein said processor further includes a transmission
2 control module to facilitate transmission of said outgoing messages, wherein said transmission
3 control module includes:

4 a head unit transmission module to facilitate transmission of said database update
5 message as said broadcast message inserted within said unit message in response to said
6 communication unit being designated as a head unit; and

7 a member transmission module to facilitate transmission of said database update
8 message from said communication unit directly to a corresponding head unit in response to
9 said communication unit being designated as a member unit.

1 11. The unit of claim 10 wherein said transmission control module further
2 includes:

3 a head unit timer module to set head unit timers subsequent transmission of said
4 database update message by said head unit transmission module and in response to said
5 communication unit being designated as a head unit, wherein said head unit timers indicate
6 a time for re-transmission of said database update message to corresponding member units
7 and other head units;

8 a member timer module to set a member unit timer subsequent transmission of said
9 database update message by said member transmission module and in response to said
10 communication unit being designated as a member unit, wherein said member unit timer
11 indicates a time for re-transmission of said database update message to a corresponding head
12 unit; and

13 a re-transmission module to facilitate re-transmission of said database update message
14 in response to expiration of a member or head unit timer, wherein said database update
15 message is re-transmitted directly to communication units associated with said expired timer
16 and that have not acknowledged receipt of said database update message.

1 12. The unit of claim 11 wherein said head unit transmission module facilitates
2 transmission of said database update message at least two times and said head unit timer
3 module sets said head unit timers subsequent transmission of said database update packet said
4 at least two times.

1 13. The unit of claim 10 wherein said processor further includes:

2 a reception module to facilitate reception and processing of messages including said

3 unit and database update messages, wherein said reception module includes:
4 an implied acknowledgment module for processing said received message as
5 an acknowledgment message in response to said received message being an initial
6 transmission of a database update packet previously received by said communication unit.

1 14. The unit of claim 13 wherein said reception module further includes:
2 a message discard module to discard a received message in response to determining
3 that said received message is not received from a neighboring communication unit as
4 indicated by said communication unit database; and
5 a message processing module to process a received database update message in
6 response to determining that said received database update message has not been previously
7 received by said communication unit, wherein said processing module includes:
8 a database update module to update said database with information contained
9 within said received database update message;
10 a member acknowledgment module to facilitate transmission of an
11 acknowledgment message as said broadcast message inserted within said unit message in
12 response to receiving said database update message and said communication unit being
13 designated as a member unit;
14 a head unit forwarding module to facilitate transmission of said processed
15 database update message by said head unit transmission module in response to said
16 communication unit being designated as a head unit; and
17 a member unit forwarding module to facilitate transmission of said processed
18 database update message by said member transmission module in response to said
19 communication unit being designated as a member unit.

1 15. The unit of claim 13 wherein said reception module further includes:
2 a re-transmission acknowledgment module to facilitate transmission of an
3 acknowledgment message directly to a communication unit transmitting said received
4 database update message in response to said received database update message being a re-
5 transmission of a database update packet previously received by said communication unit.

1 16. In a communications network, a method of transmitting and receiving
2 messages between communication units within said network comprising the steps of:

3 (a) periodically transmitting a unit message within said network from each
4 communication unit, wherein said unit message includes information relating to a status of
5 a corresponding communication unit transmitting that unit message; and

6 (b) inserting a broadcast message within a corresponding unit message of said each
7 communication unit to transmit said broadcast message in conjunction with transmission of
8 said corresponding unit message.

1 17. The method of claim 16 wherein step (a) further includes:

2 (a.1) transmitting said unit message from said each communication unit in the form
3 of radio signals.

1 18. The method of claim 16 wherein step (b) further includes:

2 (b.1) storing said broadcast message in a storage device within said each
3 communication unit until a succeeding transmission time for said corresponding unit message.

1 19. The method of claim 18 wherein step (b.1) further includes:

2 (b.1.1) storing a plurality of broadcast messages within said storage unit of said each
3 communication unit and inserting at least one of said stored messages within said
4 corresponding unit message.

1 20. The method of claim 16 wherein step (a) further includes:

2 (a.1) facilitating communications within said network in accordance with an intranet
3 protocol; and

4 (a.2) facilitating communications between said network and an external network in
5 accordance with an internetworking protocol.

1 21. The method of claim 20 wherein step (a.2) further includes:

2 (a.2.1) facilitating communications between said network and an external network in
3 accordance with a Radio Open Shortest Path First protocol.

1 22. The method of claim 20 wherein said unit message is associated with said
2 intranet protocol and said broadcast message is associated with said internetworking protocol,
3 and step (a.1) further includes:

4 (a.1.1) periodically transmitting said unit message from said each communication unit
5 in accordance with said intranet protocol; and

6 step (b) further includes:

7 (b.1) inserting said internetworking protocol broadcast message into said
8 corresponding intranet protocol unit message to facilitate transmission of said broadcast
9 message in conjunction with said transmission of said corresponding intranet protocol unit
10 message.

1 23. The method of claim 20 wherein said communications network includes a
2 plurality of clusters each having a plurality of said communication units, wherein one of said
3 communication units of each said cluster is designated as a head unit with remaining
4 communication units of that cluster being designated as member units, wherein head units of
5 said clusters communicate with each other and with corresponding member units of that
6 cluster to facilitate communications between and within said clusters, and wherein step (a.2)
7 further includes:

8 (a.2.1) storing information within a database of said each communication unit
9 indicating particular network communication units in communication with that
10 communication unit; and

11 (a.2.2) distributing a database update message including information relating to a
12 current status of network connections throughout said network in accordance with said
13 internetworking protocol to synchronize said database of said each communication unit.

1 24. The method of claim 23 wherein step (a.2.2) further includes:

2 (a.2.2.1) transmitting said database update message from each member unit
3 receiving said database update message directly to a corresponding head unit; and

4 step (b) further includes:

5 (b.1) transmitting said database update message from each head unit receiving said
6 database update message as said broadcast message inserted within said corresponding unit

7 message.

1 25. The method of claim 24 wherein step (a.2.2) further includes:

2 (a.2.2.2) setting a member unit timer within each said member unit transmitting
3 a corresponding database update message subsequent said transmission in step (a.2.2.1),
4 wherein said member unit timer indicates a time for re-transmission of said corresponding
5 database update message to a corresponding head unit; and

6 step (b) further includes:

7 (b.2) setting head unit timers within each said head unit transmitting a corresponding
8 database update message subsequent said transmission in step (b.1), wherein said head unit
9 timers indicate a time for re-transmission of said corresponding database update message to
10 corresponding member units and other head units;

11 (b.3) re-transmitting said database update message from each said head unit having
12 an expired head unit timer, wherein said database update message is re-transmitted from
13 those head units directly to communication units associated with a corresponding expired
14 timer that have not acknowledged receipt of said database update message; and

15 (b.4) re-transmitting said database update message from each said member unit
16 having an expired member unit timer, wherein said database update message is re-transmitted
17 from those member units directly to a corresponding head unit that has not acknowledged
18 receipt of said database update message.

1 26. The method of claim 25 wherein step (b.1) further includes:

2 (b.1.1) transmitting said database update message at least two times from said each
3 head unit receiving said database update message; and

4 step (b.2) further includes:

5 (b.2.1) setting said head unit timers within said each head unit transmitting said
6 database update message subsequent transmission of said corresponding database update
7 message said at least two times.

1 27. The method of claim 24 further including the step of:

2 (c) receiving and processing messages including said unit and database update

3 messages within said each communication unit, wherein step (c) further includes:

4 (c.1) processing a received message as an acknowledgment message within each said
5 communication unit in response to said received message being an initial transmission of a
6 database update message previously received by that communication unit.

1 28. The method of claim 27 wherein step (c) further includes:

2 (c.2) discarding a received message within said each communication unit in
3 response to determining that said received message is not received from a neighboring
4 communication unit as indicated by said database of that communication unit; and

5 (c.3) processing a received database update message within said each
6 communication unit in response to determining that said received database update message
7 has not been previously received by that communication unit, wherein step (c.3) further
8 includes:

9 (c.3.1) updating said database of said each communication unit with
10 information contained within a corresponding received database update message;

11 (c.3.2) transmitting an acknowledgment message from each member unit as
12 said broadcast message inserted within said unit message in response to that member unit
13 receiving said database update message;

14 (c.3.3) facilitating transmission of said processed database update message
15 from said each head unit as said broadcast message inserted within said unit message in
16 response to that head unit receiving said database update message; and

17 (c.3.4) facilitating transmission of said processed database update message
18 from said each member unit directly to a corresponding head unit in response to that member
19 unit receiving said database update message.

1 29. The method of claim 27 wherein step (c) further includes:

2 (c.2) transmitting an acknowledgment message from said each communication unit
3 directly to a communication unit transmitting said received database update message in
4 response to that communication unit receiving said database update message as a re-
5 transmission of a database update message previously received by that communication unit.

1 30. A communication network comprising:
2 a plurality of clusters each having a plurality of communication units, wherein one of
3 said communication units of each said cluster is designated as a head unit with remaining
4 communication units of that cluster being designated as member units, wherein head units of
5 said clusters communicate with each other and with corresponding member units of that
6 cluster to facilitate communications between and within said clusters;
7 wherein each said head unit includes:
8 a head unit transmission module to periodically transmit a unit message within
9 said network, wherein said unit message includes information relating to a status of that head
10 unit; and
11 a message broadcast module to insert a broadcast message within said unit
12 message to facilitate transmission of said broadcast message within said network in
13 conjunction with transmission of said unit message;
14 wherein each said member unit includes:
15 a member unit transmission module to transmit said broadcast message directly
16 to a corresponding head unit to facilitate transmission of said broadcast message throughout
17 said network via said corresponding head unit.

1 31. The network of claim 30 wherein said each head unit and member unit
2 transmits messages in the form of radio signals.

1 32. The network of claim 30 wherein said each head unit and member unit further
2 includes a database to store information indicating particular communication units in
3 communication with that unit, wherein said head and member units transmit a database update
4 message including information relating to a current status of network connections as said
5 broadcast message to synchronize each said database.

1 33. The network of claim 32 wherein said each head unit and member unit further
2 includes:
3 a reception module to facilitate reception and processing of messages including said
4 unit and database update messages, wherein said reception module includes:

5 an implied acknowledgment module for processing a received database update
6 message as an acknowledgment message in response to said received database update
7 message being an initial transmission of a database update message previously received by
8 that unit.

1 34. In a communication network including a plurality of clusters each having a
2 plurality of communication units, wherein one of said communication units of each said
3 cluster is designated as a head unit with remaining communication units of that cluster being
4 designated as member units, wherein head units of said clusters communicate with each other
5 and with corresponding member units of that cluster to facilitate communications between and
6 within said clusters, a method of transmitting messages within said network comprising the
7 steps of:

8 (a) periodically transmitting a unit message within said network from each said
9 head unit, wherein said unit message includes information relating to a status of that head
10 unit;

11 (b) inserting a broadcast message within said unit message by said each head unit
12 receiving said broadcast message to facilitate transmission of said broadcast message within
13 said network in conjunction with transmission of said unit message; and

14 (c) transmitting said broadcast message from each said member unit receiving that
15 message directly to a corresponding head unit to facilitate transmission of said broadcast
16 message throughout said network via said corresponding head unit.

1 35. The method of claim 34 wherein said each head unit and member unit
2 transmits messages in the form of radio signals.

1 36. The method of claim 34 wherein said each head unit and member unit includes
2 a database to store information indicating particular communication units in communication
3 with that unit, wherein step (b) further includes:

4 (b.1) inserting a database update message including information relating to a current
5 status of network connections within said unit message by said each head unit receiving said
6 database update message to facilitate transmission of said database update message within

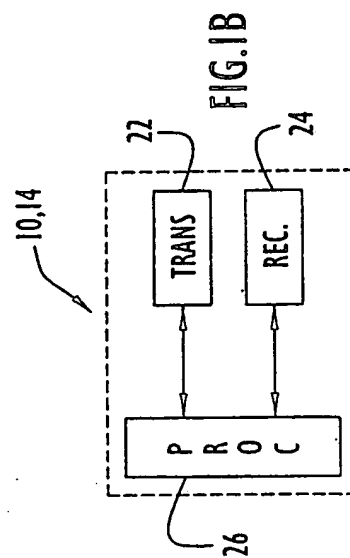
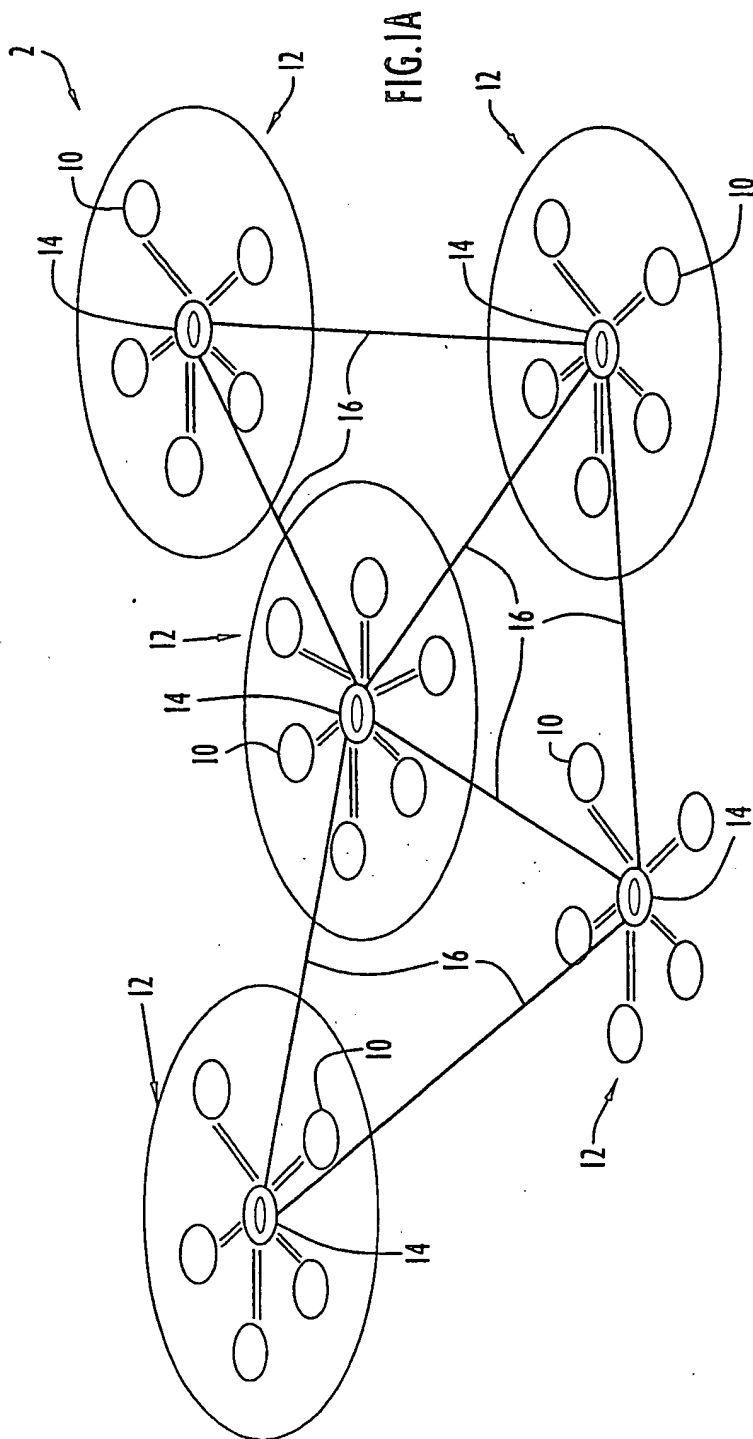
7 said network to synchronize said each database; and
8 step (c) further includes:
9 (c.1) transmitting said database update message from each said member unit
10 receiving that message directly to a corresponding head unit to facilitate transmission of said
11 database update message throughout said network via said corresponding head unit.

1 37. The method of claim 36 further including the step of:

2 (d) receiving and processing messages including said unit and database update
3 messages by said each head unit and member unit, wherein step (d) further includes:

4 (d.1) processing a received database update message as an acknowledgment
5 message by each said head unit and member unit receiving said database update message in
6 response to said received database update message being an initial transmission of a database
7 update message previously received by that unit.

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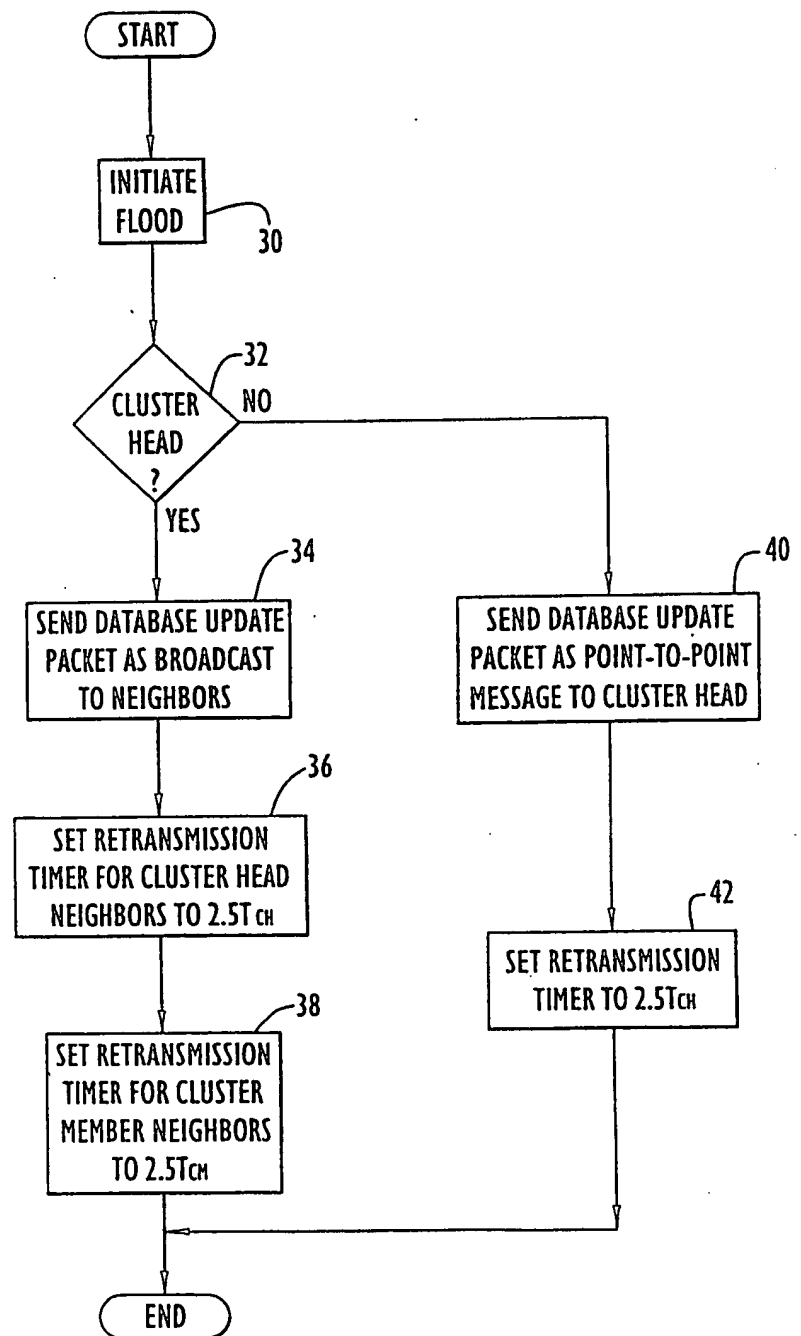
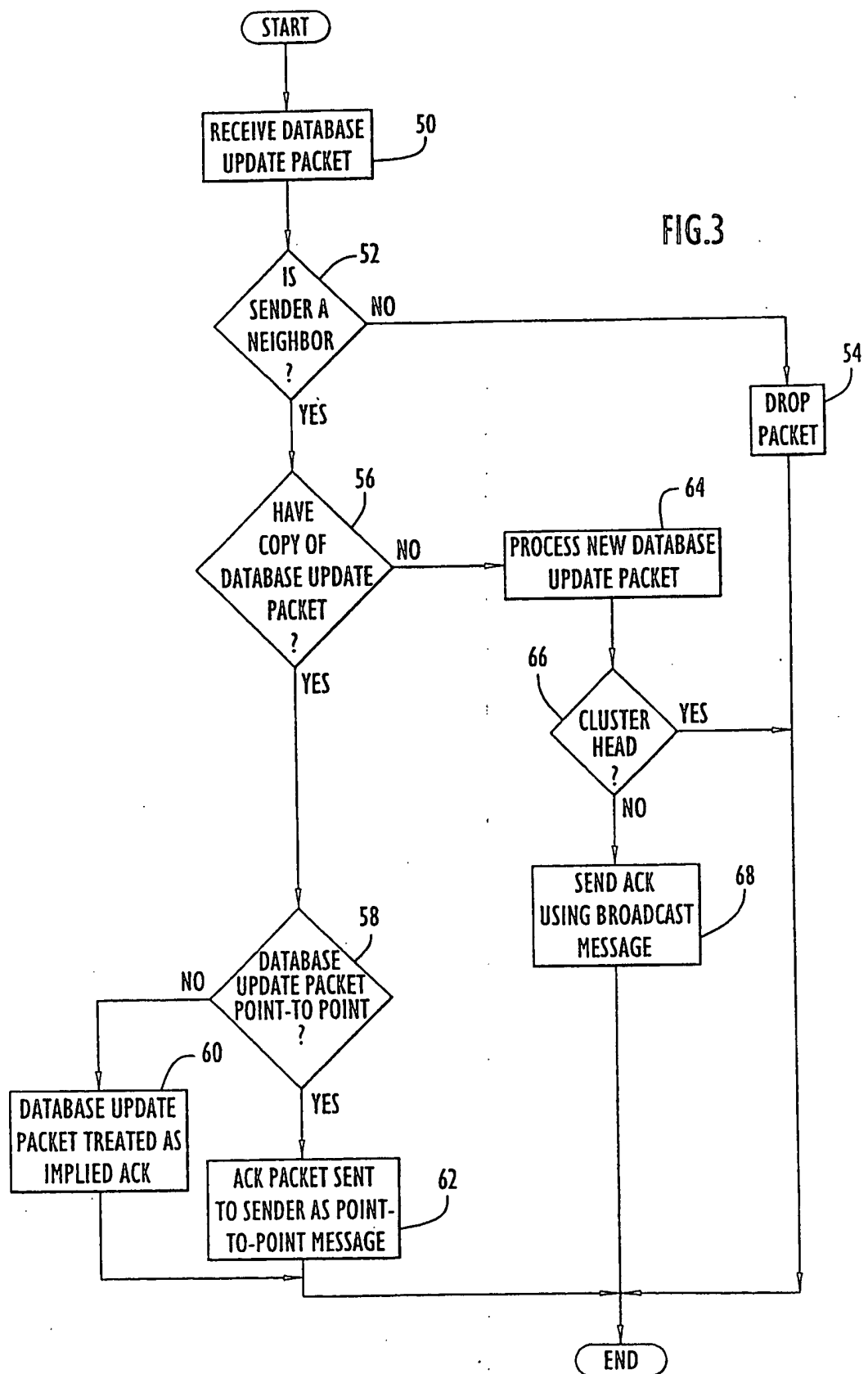


FIG.2

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FIG.3



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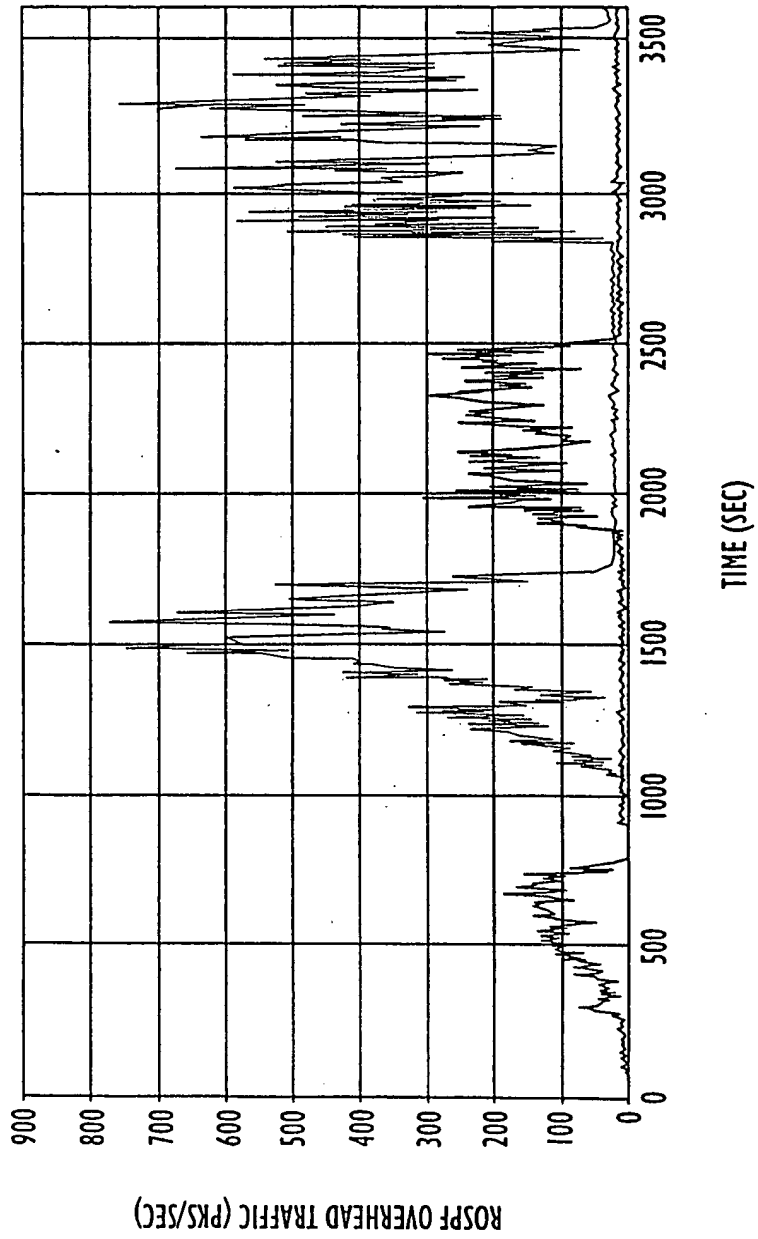


FIG.4

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